

## Living in Exile:

### Daily Life and International Relations

#### at SWAPO's Kongwa Camp

CHRISTIAN A. WILLIAMS

*Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape*

*From 1964, when it was first granted by the Tanzanian government to OAU recognized liberation movements, Kongwa camp has been a key site in southern Africa's exile history. First SWAPO and FRELIMO, and later the ANC, MPLA and ZAPU, inhabited neighbouring sites near the town of Kongwa in central Tanzania, where they trained their respective members in guerrilla tactics and prepared to infiltrate their countries of origin. Despite the importance of Kongwa for any history of southern Africa's liberation struggles, few secondary sources draw attention to Kongwa as a lived space, and none consider it beyond the historiography of a particular national movement. In contrast, this essay highlights the experiences of Namibians living in an international community at Kongwa during the 1960s. Drawing on taped interviews, published memoirs, the ANC's Morogoro Papers, and Tanzanian historiography and ethnography, it argues that Kongwa shaped a social hierarchy among exiled Namibians determined by their differing abilities to form relationships with non-Namibians around the camp. The essay traces the formation of this hierarchy through histories of how Kongwa camp formed; of how Namibians related to Tanzanian officials, other liberation movement members, and local farmers there; and of how such relationships shaped the form and resolution of conflicts within SWAPO. I emphasize that these histories are obscured by southern Africa's national historiographies and that they demand a regional approach to exile which attends to the particular sites and kinds of spaces in which exiles lived.<sup>1</sup>*

Kongwa has been a key site in southern Africa's exile history since 1964, when it was granted by the Tanzanian government to liberation movements recognized by the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO) – and later the African National Congress (ANC), the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and other movements – first inhabited neighbouring camps near the town of Kongwa in central Tanzania, where they trained their respective members in guerrilla tactics and prepared to infiltrate their countries of origin. Some people passed through Kongwa only briefly as they moved between training courses and combat zones,

---

1 This article draws from research conducted with the support of the University of the Western Cape's Centre for Humanities Research and presented at 'Camps, Liberation Movements, Politics', a conference which I convened at UWC in August 2011. Parts of the article also draw from my doctoral dissertation, 'Exile History: An Ethnography of the SWAPO Camps and the Namibian Nation' (University of Michigan, 2009), where I discuss Kongwa through the experiences of one of the camp's former inhabitants (222-239). I am grateful to all who contributed to this research, including research participants (whose names appear in the citations) and colleagues. Of these colleagues, I would especially like to acknowledge Sifiso Ndlovu and Paolo Israel who introduced me to several of the archival sources discussed below.

but many also lived at Kongwa for years as they awaited instructions from their commanders and sought other opportunities abroad. There, southern Africa's liberation movements, several of which are now ruling parties, governed their own citizens for the first time. And these nations in waiting were shaped by Kongwa's unique international community, consisting of local agro-pastoralists, Tanzanian officials, southern African exiles, and the far-flung governments and organizations which supported and influenced them.

Such qualities of Kongwa's camps – of the camp as an international, lived space – are barely reflected in historical literature. Most often, sources mention Kongwa as part of the history of one liberation movement's armed struggle. For example, Peter Katjavivi, SWAPO's former Secretary of Information and a professional historian, writes in his book, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, that SWAPO ran 'operational headquarters in Tanzania' from which it coordinated its 'fighting units' in Namibia and where 'the fighters were brought together ... to harmonise and agree upon final operational procedures'.<sup>2</sup> There is no reference to the particular place where this camp is located, nor to the years when Namibians and people of other nationalities lived together there. Other authors associate Kongwa with moments of conflict within a liberation movement. Thus, in Namibian historiography, Kongwa has been invoked as a crisis ('the Kongwa Crisis') in which seven guerrillas ('the Seven Comrades' or 'Chinamen') based at Kongwa in 1968 openly criticized the SWAPO leadership and were detained by the Tanzanian authorities.<sup>3</sup> While making important contributions to historical knowledge, these and other texts consistently frame Kongwa as part of a nation's history and reduce the sites where exiles lived to 'events', 'heroes' and 'villains' in narrow nationalist narratives.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, this article describes the international relations of daily life at SWAPO's Kongwa camp and relates this life to tensions which developed among Namibians there during the 1960s. I argue that SWAPO officials responsible for fellow nationals at Kongwa used their privileged access to representatives of other nations around the camp to manage conflicts emerging within it. This perspective is obscured in histories of 'the Kongwa Crisis', which focus on the role of a few individuals in a national liberation struggle rather than on the international relations which enabled elites to speak on a nation's behalf. Nevertheless, this perspective may be developed through the oral testimonies of Namibians who lived at Kongwa and the archives and historiographies of different nations, which extend these testimonies beyond their national frames. By drawing attention to Kongwa as an international, lived space, the article provides insight into social contexts in 1960s Tanzania with far reaching consequences for post-colonial Namibia. It illuminates people whose experiences in the past, and grievances in the present, have been

---

2 Peter Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), 60, 85. Histories of other liberation movements refer to Kongwa in very similar ways. See, for example, Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 1999), 50.

3 Lauren Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia, 1960-1991: War by Other Means* (Basel: P.Schlettwein Publishing, 1991), 37-38; Colin Leys and John S. Saul, eds., *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (London: James Currey, 1995), 43-44; Justine Hunter, *Die Politik der Erinnerung und des Vergessens in Namibia: Umgang mit Schwere Menschenrechtsverletzungen der Ära des Bewaffneten Befreiungskampfes, 1966 bis 1989* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2008), 77-80; Paul Trehwela, *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009), 143, 189. Trehwela's work was previously published in 1990 in the journal *Searchlight South Africa*.

4 Among this literature, Sifiso Ndlovu's work is unique because it includes a substantial discussion of daily life at Kongwa. See Sifiso Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970' in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1 (1960-1970)* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004), 411-478. Nevertheless, it and the interviews from which it draws focus squarely on the ANC camp, offering little attention to those who lived alongside South Africans at Kongwa. See *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories* (Houghton: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, 2008).

effaced by histories of exile in southern Africa. And it suggests what is at stake in writing histories which focus on Kongwa and the other camps where southern African exiles lived.

### Living at Kongwa: A New International Community

On 25 May 1963, the Organization of African Unity was formed in Addis Ababa. Among the groups established under the auspices of the OAU was the Co-ordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa, which soon became known as the 'OAU Liberation Committee'. Tasked to decolonize the territories in Africa which remained under colonial rule, the Liberation Committee was made responsible for coordinating aid given to liberation movements and for managing a liberation fund. Importantly, the Liberation Committee's headquarters were to be based in Dar es Salaam. There it would be close to those southern Africa nations whose liberation movements were opposing colonial and apartheid regimes and would receive support from the Tanzanian (then Tanganyikan) government, led by Julius Nyerere.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid-1960s the number of southern African exiles in Tanzania was growing quickly. Some of these early exiles were political activists who had recently established offices in Dar es Salaam for their liberation movements or were seeking recognition from the Tanzanian government. Increasingly, however, there were other southern Africans entering Tanzania and Dar es Salaam. In the case of SWAPO, the majority of exiles who entered Tanzania during the early 1960s were contract workers recruited in Francistown, Bechuanaland.<sup>6</sup> In 1962 and 1963 SWAPO transferred some of these exiles from Tanzania to Egypt, the USSR and China where they participated in military training courses alongside exiles from other liberation movements.<sup>7</sup> Other exiles enrolled in schools, above all Kurasini International Educational Centre, a secondary school established by the African-American Institute in Dar es Salaam to prepare southern Africans for tertiary studies.<sup>8</sup> Still others found themselves without any occupation or place to stay and moved into overcrowded refugee camps administered by humanitarian organizations on the outskirts of the city.<sup>9</sup>

It is in this context that the Tanzanian government, on behalf of the Liberation Committee, set aside a tract of land in central Tanzania for the liberation

---

5 Klaas van Walraven, *Dreams of Power: The Role of the Organization of African Unity in the Politics of Africa, 1963-1993* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, African Studies Centre Research Series, No. 13, 1999), 238.

6 In the Namibian literature only Tony Emmet draws attention to the importance of SWAPO's Francistown office for recruiting most of the early Namibian exiles. See Tony Emmet, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999), 331-332. All of my research participants who lived in exile during the 1960s emphasized the importance of the Francistown office. See, for example, Interviews with Samson Ndeikwila, 21 July 2007, 28; Nambinga Kati, 11 August 2007, 7-8; Helao Shityuwete, 14 December 2010. Page numbers accompanying interviews refer to transcripts which I have donated to the National Archives of Namibia and to the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape.

7 Interview with John Otto Nankudhu and Helao Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 1; Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered* (London: Panaf Books, 2001), 158-159; Susan Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means: SWAPO's Liberation War' in Colin Leys and John S. Saul, eds. *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, 20; Leonard Philemon 'Castro' Nangolo, *My History* (1994), 2. In *Where Others Wavered*, SWAPO President Sam Nujoma refers also to Algeria, Ghana and North Korea as places where SWAPO members received military training by 1963, but John Otto Nankudhu and Helao Shityuwete, two of the first guerrillas trained by SWAPO, maintain that Namibians accessed military training in Algeria, Ghana and North Korea only later.

8 Kurasini opened its doors in December 1962 and became a full-fledged secondary school in 1965. By January 1967, 188 students were enrolled there, including 150 'refugee students' from Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, South Africa and South West Africa (ANC Morogoro Office, Box 11, Folder 96, 'Kurasini International Education Centre', 2-3).

9 See, for example, Interviews with Silas Shikongo, 26 July 2007, 13-15; Kaulfilwa Nepelilo, 3 August 2007, 6. One source suggests that the growing numbers of southern African exiles living on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam may have been seen by the Tanzanian authorities as a security risk – especially after the January 1964 coup attempt against Nyerere's government (Interview with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 18).

movements. The land was situated at the site of an abandoned school and railway station located less than two kilometres west of Kongwa village and eighty kilometres east of Dodoma.<sup>10</sup> According to Samora Machel, he and other FRELIMO cadres arrived at Kongwa and began to construct the camp on 4 April 1964.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, John Otto Nankudhu, one of the first group of SWAPO guerrillas to inhabit Kongwa,<sup>12</sup> indicates that he and his Namibian comrades arrived at the site around April 1964 and, within two days, were joined by a larger group of Mozambicans led by Samora Machel.<sup>13</sup> Over the next several weeks, SWAPO and FRELIMO members renovated the dilapidated school building into soldiers' barracks, constructed new buildings to be used as offices and kitchens, and separated the two movements' camps with a barbed wire fence.<sup>14</sup> In all these activities, the liberation movements were aided by local Tanzanians who, at the request of Tanzanian government officials, helped with the camps' construction and provided food and drink for the workers.<sup>15</sup> By May the Namibians and Mozambicans had moved out of their tents, which they had pitched in the bush near Kongwa, and into their respective camps.<sup>16</sup>

From the perspective of its first inhabitants and many others, the site allocated to the liberation movements at Kongwa<sup>17</sup> must have appeared a periphery. It was situated far from the borders of Tanzania and of exiles' countries of origin. It was also located nearly 500 kilometres from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's main urban centre as well as the centre of the liberation movements' respective communities in exile. Driving the rough, gravel road between Dar es Salaam and Kongwa was a full day's journey,<sup>18</sup> and although there was a railway stop located fifteen kilometres northeast of the camp along the line running inland from Dar es Salaam to Lake Tanganyika, the liberation movements' access to the railway was restricted by the Tanzanian government.<sup>19</sup> The territory surrounding Kongwa was sparsely populated. The village of Kongwa was inhabited by no more than 1000 people.<sup>20</sup> Around it lay farmland and small, shifting settlements occupied by people who collectively referred to themselves as 'Wagogo'.<sup>21</sup> Through a combination of agriculture, cattle-

- 
- 10 Interviews with Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011; Helao Shityuwete, 14 December 2010; 17 December 2010; Toivo Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 21; Ndeikwila, 21 July 2007, 22; Ndlovu, 'ANC in Exile', 463; 'Kongwa: Berço da Revolução', *Tempos* (15 June 1975), 19. Shityuwete maintains that the railway station was built during the German colonial period (Interviews with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010; 17 December 2010).
- 11 'Kongwa: Berço da Revolução', 19. Interestingly, Machel, and the *Tempos* article in which he is cited, make no reference to SWAPO – despite the fact that FRELIMO and SWAPO established the first camps there together.
- 12 Interviews with Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 1; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 24; Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 158-9.
- 13 Interview with Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 1-2. It should be noted that in *Where Others Wavered*, Sam Nujoma writes that 'on 27 May 1963, [SWAPO] opened [its] military camp at Kongwa in Tanzania'. Although it is possible that Nujoma is referring to a formal ceremony at which land was allocated by the Tanzanian government to SWAPO, members of SWAPO and FRELIMO appear not to have moved to Kongwa until April 1964.
- 14 Interview with Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 2, 3-4; *Tempos* (15 June 1975), 19, 21. Interestingly, there is no reference in the *Tempos* article to the buildings which exiles found on site when they arrived at Kongwa, but Nankudhu is quite detailed in his description of the buildings that the liberation movements found at the camp and how they were divided between SWAPO and FRELIMO.
- 15 Interview with Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 4-5.
- 16 Interview with Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 4-5; *Tempos* (15 June 1975), 20.
- 17 Henceforth, I will use 'Kongwa' to refer to the site given to the liberation movements outside Kongwa village. If I wish to refer to the village or to a particular liberation movement's camp at Kongwa, I will specify accordingly.
- 18 Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010; Lawrence Phokanoka ('Peter Tladi') in *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling their Stories* (Johannesburg: Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust), 418.
- 19 No people or military equipment belonging to the liberation movements could travel via rail due to the threat which such travel entailed for the Tanzanian state (Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010). For more detail about how supplies moved to and from Kongwa, see the subsection below 'International Relations and Camp Daily Life'.
- 20 For estimates of Kongwa's population during the 1960s, see Interview with Helao Shityuwete, 14 December 2010 and Interview with Samson Ndeikwila, 21 July 2007, 22.
- 21 Interviews with Nashilongo, 11 December 2010; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010. According to Peter Rigby, an anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in the region from 1961 to 1963, Kongwa corresponds to the northeastern region of 'Ugogo' (Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship among the Gogo: A Semi-Pastoral Society in Central Tanzania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 12).

raising and migration, the Wagogo subsisted in a region prone to extended droughts and killing famines.<sup>22</sup> During the late 1940s Kongwa briefly became a site in a massive British development project known as the 'East African Groundnut Scheme' and, by the 1960s,<sup>23</sup> some Wagogo had entered Tanzania's migrant labour system and were selling groundnuts (*karanga*) in a cash economy.<sup>24</sup> Regardless of the impact of these changes on Gogo communities,<sup>25</sup> they, and their new neighbours, lived on the distant margins of a world system.

Nevertheless, they all now lived at the centre of a new international community forming around the liberation movements at Kongwa. In the beginning, FRELIMO's was the largest presence in this community. According to Samora Machel, by September 1964 Kongwa had already accommodated at least 250 FRELIMO guerrillas who, following military training in the camp, infiltrated Mozambique and initiated the armed struggle.<sup>26</sup> From then until FRELIMO vacated Kongwa in 1966, hundreds of FRELIMO guerrillas were moving between the camp and locations in Mozambique where they were involved in military operations and supplying those living in the liberated zones.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, the group of SWAPO guerrillas which established Kongwa in April 1964 consisted of only twelve to fifteen individuals.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, their numbers did increase rapidly. According to one source, by the latter part of 1964 there were roughly 100 Namibians living at Kongwa and, by the middle of 1965, there were nearly 300.<sup>29</sup> For the most part, these guerrillas remained inside the camp with only small groups departing from it to infiltrate Namibia in the latter part of 1965 and 1966.

Within a year or so of the first camps' openings, other liberation movements also established camps at Kongwa. In August 1964 the ANC founded its camp.<sup>30</sup> Located on the site of the old railway station about 50 metres outside the SWAPO and FRELIMO camps,<sup>31</sup> the ANC camp was first inhabited by Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cadres returning from military training in Egypt and the USSR, followed by others

22 Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 20; Gregory Maddox, 'Environment & Population Growth: In Ugogo Central Tanzania' in Gregory Maddox and James L. Giblin, eds., *Custodians of the Land* (London: James Currey, 1996), 43; Derek Peterson, 'Morality Plays: Marriage, Church Courts, and Colonial Agency in Central Tanganyika, ca. 1876-1928', *The American Historical Review*, 111, 4, 988-990. Maddox emphasizes that the region is the most famine prone region in all of Tanzania with an average annual rainfall of about 500 mm per year, just surpassing the minimum for supporting agriculture.

23 For a discussion of the 'The Groundnut Scheme' and its relationship to Kongwa, see Jan S. Hogendorn and K. M. Scott, 'Very Large-Scale Agricultural Projects: The Lessons of the East African Groundnut Scheme' in Robert I. Rotberg, ed. *Imperialism, Colonialism, and Hunger: East and Central Africa* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1983), 167-198. It should further be noted that Archie Sibeko, a former ANC commander at Kongwa, suggests that the buildings which the ANC inhabited at Kongwa may previously have been used by officials implementing the Groundnut Scheme (Sibeko, *Our Lifetime*, 81). None of my research participants, however, mentioned this connection.

24 Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 20, 22, 23; Maddox, 'Environment & Population Growth', 54, 56-57.

25 In his text (*Cattle and Kinship*) Rigby emphasizes that migrant labour and cash crops had minimal impact on 'Gogo culture', the topic of his study, whereas Maddox's article ('Environment & Population Growth') draws attention to changes in Ugogo over time.

26 'Kongwa: Berço da Revolução', 19-23.

27 'Kongwa: Berço da Revolução', 19-23; Interview with Shityuwete 14 December 2010.

28 Among the original group of Namibians at Kongwa were the following twelve individuals: Tobias Hainyeko, Leonard Philemon 'Castro' Nangolo, John Otto Nankudhu, Titus Mualelpeni Shitilifa, Patrick Israel Iyambo, Peter Hambiya, Lazarus Sakaria, Peter 'Shinyafa' Haitembu, Simeon Linkela Shixungileni, James Hamukuaja Angula, Messah Victory Namuandi and Nelson Kavela (Interview with Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2 June 2011, 1; Interview with Shityuwete 24 July 2007, 24). Interestingly, Nankudhu and other research participants sometimes refer to 'the fifteen Namibians' who originally inhabited Kongwa, but when asked to list the names of these original inhabitants, Nankudhu and Shityuwete both identified the same twelve names.

29 Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf* (London: Kliptown Books, 1990), 99-100; Interview with Shityuwete 24 July 2007, 1-2. Shityuwete was responsible for keeping records in the camp office in 1965.

30 Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', 457; Sibeko, *Our Lifetime*, 80-81; Isaac Makopo in *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories*, 210; Tladi, *Telling Their Stories*, 418. It should be noted that most of these authors give the impression that when the ANC entered Kongwa that there were no other liberation movements based there. Only Peter Tladi mentions that when the ANC arrived at Kongwa 'we found that FRELIMO and SWAPO were more or less in the same camp'.

31 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 22; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010; Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 2.

who had recently travelled from South Africa to Tanzania.<sup>32</sup> Numbers increased very quickly such that by the end of 1964, there may have been 400 to 500 South Africans living in the camp, making it the second largest at Kongwa.<sup>33</sup> At least four of these first MK cadres at Kongwa were women, contrasting with the SWAPO and FRELIMO camps where there appear to have been even fewer women at this time.<sup>34</sup> In 1965 the MPLA and ZAPU also moved to Kongwa.<sup>35</sup> There these two liberation movements initially located themselves two to three kilometres from the SWAPO, FRELIMO and ANC camps.<sup>36</sup> Numbers fluctuated considerably in the MPLA camp as its leaders prepared to take advantage of Zambian independence in 1964 and Zambian government recognition in early 1965 by opening a new front along the Zambian-Angolan border.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, former exiles at Kongwa maintain that during the mid-1960s both the MPLA and ZAPU camps remained small relative to the camps of FRELIMO, the ANC and SWAPO.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the liberation movements which were officially inhabiting Kongwa,<sup>39</sup> there were also others which were not recognized by the OAU that were hiding within recognized liberation movements' camps. For example, in 1965 and 1966 at least eleven soldiers aligned with Jonas Savimbi and UNITA inhabited SWAPO's Kongwa camp. Savimbi had recruited these soldiers from the Angolan community living in the Zambian Copperbelt, and he drew from SWAPO's recognition at the OAU and his close personal relationships with several SWAPO and Tanzanian officials to smuggle them into China for training and then back to Zambia and Angola.<sup>40</sup> UNITA's 'Chinese Eleven' lived among SWAPO members at Kongwa for months as the former awaited passage en route to their various assignments.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, there were others within the SWAPO camp who, prior to entering exile, had belonged to the Caprivi African National Union (CANU), a liberation movement which claimed to represent Namibia's Caprivi region. Although CANU officially merged with SWAPO in November 1964, some Caprivians continued to identify with CANU and recognize CANU leadership

32 Ndllovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', 458-460.

33 Sibeko, *Our Lifetime*, 82; Interviews with Nashilongo, 11 December 2010; Shityuwete, 14 December 2007.

34 Ruth Mompoti discusses the women in the ANC section of Kongwa in *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling Their Stories*, 315-316. Only one woman lived in the SWAPO camp during the 1960s, Meme Mukwahepo. She lived in a separate flat with her partner, David Shilunga (Interviews with Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 5; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010). Research participants maintain that there were no women in the FRELIMO camp (Interviews with Nashilongo, 11 December 2010; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010).

35 Interviews with Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 2; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 21, 22; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010; Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 5. It may be that ZANU also administered a camp at Kongwa for a period of time (e.g. Ndllovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', 464; Interviews with Helmuth 13 July 2007, 9; 10 August 2007, 11), but I have been unable to confirm the timing of ZANU's arrival or distinguish clearly between the activities of ZAPU and ZANU at Kongwa. Most of my (Namibian) research participants refer generally to 'the Zimbabweans' at Kongwa. ZAPU is clearly referenced in several of the sources which I cite here; ZANU, however, is not.

36 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 21, 22; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010.

37 Interviews with Samson Ndeikwila, 16 February 2007, 10; Ndeikwila 21 July 2007, 23; Fred Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1986), 70. Bridgland specifically refers to a group of '170 MPLA recruits' passing from Zambia through Kongwa en route to the Soviet Union in 'summer 1965' and 'another 90' which passed through the camp en route to Cuba. Previously MPLA guerrillas had been working primarily out of a base in Congo-Brazzaville near the border of Cabinda.

38 Interviews with Nashilongo, 11 December 2010; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010.

39 In addition to the previously mentioned liberation movements, the PAC is also occasionally listed among liberation movements that once based themselves at Kongwa (e.g. Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 159), but I have found no specific references to a PAC presence at Kongwa in my research, in Ndllovu's discussion of everyday life at Kongwa, or in Thami ka Plaatjie's article on the PAC in exile, 'The PAC in Exile' in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2 (1960-1970)* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2007).

40 Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, 66, 69; Interview with Helmuth, 13 July 2007, 8-10.

41 Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, 69-71; Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 21-22; Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 20; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 11-12; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010. Shityuwete's testimony strongly suggests that UNITA's 'Chinese Eleven' not only passed through Kongwa for several months in 1966 (as Bridgland narrates), but that they or others affiliated with Savimbi who lived in SWAPO's Kongwa camp in 1965.

structures even as they resided within the camp granted to SWAPO.<sup>42</sup> Thus, CANU too could be counted among the liberation movements based at Kongwa despite the fact that the movement and the territory which it claimed to represent were not widely accepted.

### **The International Relations of Daily Life at SWAPO's Kongwa Camp**

By 1965 then, Kongwa was home to an array of national liberation movements, including movements representing all of the southern African nations under white minority rule. Ostensibly, each of these movements acted as an autonomous unit, governing the daily lives of fellow nationals according to the routines set within its camp. In SWAPO's case,<sup>43</sup> the day usually began before dawn when camp inhabitants woke to participate in physical training, which included jogging and calisthenics. After returning to the barracks and eating breakfast, inhabitants assembled at the parade where they participated in the parade ceremony, registered their attendance and were assigned tasks for the day. Tasks included routine camp maintenance, such as cooking, cleaning and guard duty, as well as other activities more directly aimed at training 'freedom fighters'. For example, inhabitants took classes in which they learned how to use different kinds of firearms and explosives, and studied tactics and philosophies of guerrilla warfare. Knowledge was tested and skills were honed in various ways. Trainees made scheduled visits to the shooting range during which they would practice hitting the targets with the different weapons about which they had been taught. They also were sent on 'the long march' during which they would engage in forms of mock warfare, which included laying ambushes for rival groups and locating items hidden in the bush.<sup>44</sup> During some evenings basic mathematics and literacy classes were also held, which, some argued, were critical for guerrillas making calculations with explosives and engaging in a freedom struggle.<sup>45</sup> Clearly, other liberation movements established daily routines similar to those within the SWAPO camp.<sup>46</sup> But each movement established and administered its routines separately from the others.

In addition to living according to a particular camp's routines, each camp's inhabitants were highly dependent on the hierarchy of officials administering the camp on behalf of a given liberation movement. Thus, in SWAPO's case, Namibians who had previously trained in North Africa or overseas were responsible for those arriving at Kongwa from Namibia. These trainers became known in the camp generally as 'the commanders', and the commanders who founded Kongwa in

---

42 For more details about CANU-SWAPO relations at Kongwa see the section of this essay titled "The Kongwa Crisis".

43 In this instance, as in other cases in which I make collective claims about the SWAPO camp in this paper, I draw from all of my interviews with inhabitants of this camp during the 1960s. They are: Interviews with Ashipala 16 March 2007, 25 July 2007; Sylvester Hangula (pseudonym), 18 June 2011; Helmuth, 13 July 2007, 10 August 2007; Kati, 11 August 2007, 8 December 2007; Frederick Matongo, 18 June 2011; Nankudhu and Shityuwete 2 June 2011; Nashilongo 11 December 2010; Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 16 February 2007, 2 March 2007, 21 July 2007; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007; 5 June 2008; 14 December 2010; 17 December 2010; Shikongo, 16 March 2007, 26 July 2007.

44 Interviews with Ndeikwila, 21 July 2007, 25; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 6. In some instances, the 'long march' could last for days at a time. For example, Toivo Ashipala indicates that the Mozambicans (but not the Namibians) at Kongwa used to stay in the bush over consecutive days, practicing guerrilla warfare techniques (Interview with Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 7). A letter from the ANC regional commander at Morogoro on 23 July 1975 also refers to a 'long march' scheduled at Kongwa to take place over fifteen days for the purpose of practicing 'a.) Sabotage, b.) Ambush, c.) Raids, d.) Crossing of roads, borders and boundaries, and also villages' (ANC Morogoro Office, Box 26, Folder 17).

45 Interview with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 6; Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 2-3.

46 See, for example, Ndlovu's description daily life in the ANC's camp at Kongwa ("The ANC in Exile: 1960-1970", *Road to Democracy*, 463-469) as well as in testimonies recorded in the *Telling Their Stories*.

1964 were granted seniority among them.<sup>47</sup> Together, the senior commanders and SWAPO's political leaders based in Dar es Salaam granted particular individuals further authority over spheres of camp life. Thus, the titles 'First, Second and Third Chief-in-Command' were conferred on those responsible for the camp and the army as a whole, 'First, Second and Third Secretary' on those responsible for logistical and administrative details in the camp, and 'Political Commissar' and 'Deputy Political Commissar' on those responsible for soldiers' political education and morale.<sup>48</sup> Together, this hierarchy of commanders distributed food, monitored movement and dispersed information among those who lived in the camp. And the hierarchy's jurisdiction over camp and nation was ritually reinforced through camp activities – especially during the parade when senior commanders officially set the terms of camp life and led inhabitants in drills and songs proclaiming the Namibian nation and praising SWAPO and its leaders.<sup>49</sup>

Beyond the camp and its national boundaries, exiles at Kongwa were also part of an international community, which formed around particular spaces which the liberation movements shared. For example, SWAPO and FRELIMO initially shared a kitchen which required the two movements to coordinate the preparation and clean-up of meals.<sup>50</sup> SWAPO, FRELIMO and the ANC also shared an armoury which these liberation movements were responsible for guarding in joint shifts of two persons each.<sup>51</sup> Eventually, some of the liberation movements established clinics, which they opened to members of other liberation movements and surrounding communities.<sup>52</sup> The shooting range was also a shared space which not only required the organization of shifts between the liberation movements, but also the notification of those walking on the road to Kongwa village that shooting practice would begin.<sup>53</sup> Sometimes liberation movements also organized events for which they invited members of other movements to visit their camps. For example, there were occasions when one movement invited members of another to attend a special parade in its camp, such as when someone was scheduled to speak about a topic related to all of the movements' liberation struggles.<sup>54</sup> SWAPO, FRELIMO and ANC members also established a social committee, which organized events, especially concerts and dramas, which were hosted on alternating weeks in the three movements' offices.<sup>55</sup>

It should be noted that shared use of camp space was not always marked by cooperation between nations. For example, the entry of Angolans loyal to Jonas Savimbi into SWAPO's camp in 1965 initiated controversies between SWAPO and the OAU recognized liberation movements based at Kongwa.<sup>56</sup> According to one

---

47 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 7-8; Nashilongo, 11 December 2010.

48 For a detailed discussion of these various positions and their significance at Kongwa in 1965 and 1966, see Interview with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007. Peter Tladi also offers an account of how the camp command was organized in the ANC's Kongwa camp. Although the titles and breakdown of responsibilities differ, Tladi emphasizes the importance of hierarchy and titles in the camp (Tladi, *Road to Democracy*, 419).

49 See especially Interview with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 2, 7.

50 Interviews with Nankudhu, 2 June 2011, 4; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 12.

51 Interviews with Shityuwete 24 July 2007, 22; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010.

52 Interview with Shikongo, 26 July 2007, 18; Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', 465.

53 Interview with Shityuwete, 24 February 2007, 6-7.

54 Interview with Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 3.

55 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 22; Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', 464; Makopo, *Telling their Stories*, 210; Interview with Ndeikwila, 17 June 2011.

56 Interviews with: Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 20; Helmuth, 13 July 2007, 8-10; Nashilongo, 11 December 2007; Nepelilo, 4 August 2010, 11-12; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010. See also Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, 69-71. There were many reasons for the close relationship between SWAPO and UNITA over the next decade, including personal relationships between Savimbi, Nujoma and other SWAPO leaders and the strategic significance for SWAPO of co-operating closely with any liberation movement working in the parts of Angola through which SWAPO guerrillas infiltrated Namibia.

SWAPO camp commander, FRELIMO informed the MPLA, which had recently arrived at Kongwa and was more distanced from the SWAPO camp, that SWAPO was secretly harbouring Savimbi's men. Thereafter, the MPLA made arrangements with FRELIMO to place some of its members in the FRELIMO camp and, from there, to spy on SWAPO even as SWAPO became suspicious and began spying on the MPLA.<sup>57</sup> Controversy erupted again the following year when Savimbi's men returned to the camp from training in China and the MPLA lodged an official complaint with the OAU Liberation Committee that SWAPO must hand over the Angolans in its camp. SWAPO denied the accusation, apparently on the premise that 'the suspected Angolans' were, in fact, Namibians, who, like many in the camp, had grown up on both sides of the Namibian-Angolan border and therefore spoke Portuguese and African languages which crossed the artificial colonial boundary. Shortly after the complaint was lodged, SWAPO managed to smuggle the Angolans out of Tanzania with its guerrillas entering Zambia. There they reunited with Savimbi and entered Angola to become commanders of the newly launched liberation movement UNITA.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to relationships forming between the liberation movements within their camps, there were also relations forming around Kongwa at the margins of the liberation movements' control. On Sundays and some afternoons and evenings, camp commanders permitted rank-in-file soldiers to leave the camps. In these instances, and others when camp inhabitants left their camps without permission, they usually interfaced with people in the surrounding communities with whom they developed diverse relationships. For example, exiles participated in local church services.<sup>59</sup> They joined and created soccer teams which played in local leagues.<sup>60</sup> They frequented a clinic in Kongwa village before the liberation movements had established their own in their respective camps<sup>61</sup> and, even thereafter, exiles with serious ailments were referred to a local doctor who treated them for free.<sup>62</sup> They were reliant on the market in Kongwa village for buying and selling commodities, although they often had little to bring to these exchanges due to a lack of pocket money and basic supplies in the camps.<sup>63</sup> It was not uncommon for exiles to barter their own clothing for cash, and some created their own gardens near the camps primarily so that they could sell their produce in the village.<sup>64</sup> Exiles also frequented the shebeens in Kongwa location where they drank and socialized with one another and local clients.<sup>65</sup>

According to former exile sources, relations between exiles and the communities surrounding Kongwa were generally good. Many refer now to 'the Tanzanians' or 'the Wagogo' with terms of praise, describing them variously as 'kind,' 'gentle' and 'peaceful'. Clearly, they appreciated commodities, people and institutions which they

---

57 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 21; 14 December 2010.

58 Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, 70; Interview with Helmuth 13 July 2007, 9-10. In addition to these incidents, referenced widely by Namibians living at Kongwa in the mid-1960s, there are other instances of intrigue, spying and conflict between liberation movements at Kongwa to which research participants referred, but about which they offered little corroborating detail.

59 Interview with Nashilongo, 11 December 2010.

60 Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', 464; Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010.

61 Interview with Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 2.

62 Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010.

63 Interviews with Kati, 11 August 2007, 1-2; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007.

64 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 10-11; Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 7.

65 Interviews with: Ashipala 16.3.2007, 7; Ndeikwila, 16 February 2007, 11; Nepelilo, 3 August 2007, 9-10; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 10; Nashilongo 11 December 2010. According to several research participants, people often bartered clothes for pocket money in order to obtain the cash necessary for buying beer at the shebeens.

could access at Kongwa village and which were not available inside their camps. Some suggest that local people appreciated the liberation movements for the supplies and knowledge which they brought to the area as well. For example, some Namibians note how they surprised and impressed the Tanzanians near Kongwa with their farming techniques, which yielded better crops of local staples like maize and beans than the locals could produce themselves.<sup>66</sup> South African sources refer to an ANC farm, which received insecticides and seeds from the OAU, and yielded harvests which 'astounded' the Tanzanians.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, sources maintain that the ANC's 'well-equipped five-bed clinic ... did much to cement relations between the ANC and the local population, who preferred the clinic to their own state hospital.'<sup>68</sup> Perhaps, it is such resources, and their association with a broader, modern world, that led locals to refer to the exiles collectively as 'Wazungu', or 'whites'.<sup>69</sup>

Regardless of how various Tanzanians around Kongwa saw the exiles who had moved into their environs, the former certainly shaped social relations among the latter. Importantly, many exiles became proficient in speaking Swahili. For southern Africans living at Kongwa, Swahili not only enabled them to communicate with local people, but it also became a primary medium through which they communicated with one another. Within SWAPO, for example, exiles did not share a common language. Although the majority spoke Oshiwambo or closely related languages in Namibia's Kavango region, there was a sizeable minority from the Caprivi region who spoke a different set of languages, and while most of the Caprivians spoke English, most of the Ovambos did not. In this context, Swahili became the primary form of communication across the main ethnic divide among exiled Namibians at Kongwa.<sup>70</sup> Swahili was also used to communicate across Kongwa's liberation movements whose members had been exposed to different colonial languages to different degrees. Thus, Swahili became a means of crossing the linguistic divide between the former subjects of British and Portuguese colonialism.<sup>71</sup>

Tanzanians at Kongwa also became a source of, and a medium for, conflicts among exiles. Many of the most contentious issues involved sexual relationships between exiles, who were almost entirely men, and local women. For example, in the SWAPO camp certain commanders were repeatedly accused of spending the night in the Kongwa location where they were believed to be sleeping with local women.<sup>72</sup> Rank-in-file soldiers were also sometimes removed from the camps by the commanders due to sexual affairs, such as one instance in which a SWAPO cadre impregnated a married woman at Kongwa and was then threatened with violence by her husband.<sup>73</sup> In another case, a scandal developed in the ANC camp when men in the camp 'formed relationships' with women who were using the camp's water supply during a period of drought.<sup>74</sup> Allegedly, a schism between members of the ANC and

---

66 Interview with Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 3.

67 Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', 463; Isaac Makopo, *Telling Their Stories*, 211. Isaac Makopo goes so far as to say that 'the Tanzanians could not believe [the ANC farm], because it was the very first of its kind. They didn't know that people could till that arid piece of land' (Makopo, *Telling their Stories*, 211). The comment seems to overlook the arid land all around Kongwa which local people had been farming for generations, albeit with access to different technology.

68 Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', 465; Makopo, *Telling their Stories*, 210.

69 Interviews with Nashilongo, 11 December 2010; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010; Nankudhu and Shityuwete, 2 June 2011, 3.

70 Interview with Ndeikwila, 21 July 2007, 25.

71 Interviews with Ndeikwila, 21 July 2007, 25; Nepelilo 4 August 2007, 3, 11.

72 Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, 99; Interviews with Shityuwete 24 July 2007, 3; 14 December 2010; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 10.

73 Interview with Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 23.

74 Ndlovu, 'The ANC in Exile, 1960-1970', 468.

the MPLA during the mid-1960s also began with a fight over women in the Kongwa shebeens.<sup>75</sup>

Local women seem to have been a primary source of conflict among exiles at Kongwa for several reasons. Certainly, the ratio of men to women around Kongwa following the liberation movements' arrival was highly unequal and was likely to cause tension between the movements' single men and the factions which divided them. At the same time, guerrillas were officially discouraged from having sexual relationships with local women. As one former exile maintains, 'it was ... part of the training that ... you should not be somebody who likes women... that if you were going for war, you should not sleep with a woman.'<sup>76</sup> Although a Namibian couple was permitted to live together in the SWAPO camp, having 'wives in the location' was clearly not acceptable, and it appears that none of the liberation movements legitimated such relationships or cared for their offspring at this time.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, exiles became sexually involved with women at Kongwa, including camp commanders, who were in the best position both to move freely outside the camp and to discipline others who broke camp rules. Thus, local women became a common source of contention between commander and rank-in-file exiles – even as the women involved in relationships with exiles remain silent and without agency in former exiles' narratives.

Sometimes conflicts over women and other altercations prompted people and institutions outside the camps to enter camp space. Of these outside visitors the most prominent were Major Shongambe and Lieutenant Muchongo. Based at an office in Kongwa village, Shongambe and Muchongo were Tanzanian officials responsible for liaising between the liberation movements at Kongwa and the Tanzanian government. Although not involved in the camps' day to day administration, the two officers visited the camps regularly and played a crucial role in camp life. For example, whenever Tanzanians experienced a problem with members of the liberation movements, they were expected to report their problem to Shongambe's office. Working together with the Tanzanian police, Shongambe and his assistant would then detain anyone accused of breaking the law and report the incident to the relevant liberation movement camp office(s), working with officials there to resolve the matter.<sup>78</sup> In other cases, exiles requested that Shongambe intervene in a conflict within one of the liberation movement's camps. In the SWAPO camp at least, such meetings were usually initiated by the camp commanders and held in the camp office, where both commanders and rank-in-file guerrillas would attend.<sup>79</sup> Shongambe could also intervene directly in the liberation movements' affairs if he perceived the interests of the Tanzanian state to be at risk. Such risks ranged

---

75 Interview with Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 12.

76 Interview with Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 5.

77 Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010. Nevertheless, later at Kongwa the ANC was clearly discussing the organization's responsibility to children which ANC cadres had born with local people. See 'Meeting of the Region and the Camp Ad. - Kongwa 8/2/75' (Morogoro Papers, Box 5, Folder 47). SWAPO also began to discuss children and marriage in its camps during the mid-1970s after Namibian women began to enter exile in large numbers.

78 Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010. As SWAPO's Third Secretary-in-Command, Shityuwete participated in many such meetings with Shongambe and often visited the Kongwa police station to release SWAPO members who had been detained there.

79 My interviews are full of such reported instances some of which I will discuss in the following section of this paper 'The Kongwe Crisis'. See, for example, Interviews with Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 22-23, 27--29; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 20-21, 25-26; Shikongo, 16 March 2007, 7-8; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 13-14, 23; Kati, 11 August 2007, 6; Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 4; 21 July 2007, 41-42.

from the storage and use of weapons at the camps to the bill incurred by liberation movements using Tanzanian telephones installed in camp offices.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to Shongambe's office, other offices were influencing activities at Kongwa from further afield. By the mid-1960s, the southern African liberation movements were sustained materially through the support of a range of foreign governments. These included African states, which from 1963 made annual contributions to the OAU Liberation Committee's fund, which were dispersed to the OAU recognized liberation movements and their guerrilla armies.<sup>81</sup> Far more significant in financial terms were donations made by the Eastern bloc countries, especially the Soviet Union, which recognized the liberation movements whose armies were based at Kongwa. Soviet aid consisted of cash deposits as well as shipments of arms, tinned food and other commodities sent directly from the USSR.<sup>82</sup> The Chinese government also offered aid to southern African liberation movements from the early 1960s although this aid dried up for at least some of the movements at Kongwa in 1965 following the Sino-Soviet Split.<sup>83</sup> In addition to sending material aid, some foreign governments also trained liberation movement guerrillas on their own soil. Thus, by the mid-1960s, Kongwa's inhabitants included soldiers who had trained in Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Ghana, the USSR, Czechoslovakia, China and North Korea.<sup>84</sup> During their military training courses, cadres often participated in political education classes as well. There and in other encounters, they were exposed to the ideas of social revolutionaries, such as Marx, Lenin, Mao and Castro, and African nationalists, such as Nasser, Nkrumah and Nyerere. Although these names were often uttered in liberation movement circles, for some exiles at least, training programs run by foreign governments offered a more thorough introduction to the ideas of these individuals.<sup>85</sup>

Tanzanian and liberation movement officials were key intermediaries in all these relations developing between the guerrillas at Kongwa and their supporters abroad. With respect to material aid, the Tanzanian government required that items intended for the liberation movements be sent to the OAU Liberation Committee's headquarters in Dar es Salaam, ear-marked for a particular movement.<sup>86</sup> There, aid was separated into the categories 'military' and 'humanitarian'. Military aid was to be handled strictly by the Tanzanian government, which transported arms to Kongwa by military convoy and handed them over to the liberation movements in the presence of Major Shongambe. In contrast, humanitarian aid was given directly to the liberation movements in Dar es Salaam, which were then responsible for transferring this material to Kongwa themselves. In the case of SWAPO, camp commanders sometimes travelled with this aid in SWAPO vehicles. In other instances, especially when transporting staples such as maize meal and biscuits in bulk, SWAPO sent these items via train and arranged for commanders to pick

---

80 Interview with Shityuwete 24 July 2007, 8-10; ANC Morogoro Papers, Box 16, Folder 134, Letter from Eleazar Maboe to ANC Deputy President, 15 April 1967. According to the letter, the ANC and ZAPU incurred a bill of 'about 2200/- ... as compared to 300/- over the same period for MPLA and SWAPO and FRELIMO'. According to Helao Shityuwete, there were no phones in the camps when he worked at the SWAPO office from mid-1965 to February 1966 (Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010).

81 Walraven, *Dreams of Power*, 243-246; Shubin, *ANC*, 51-52.

82 Walraven, *Dreams of Power*, 244-245; Shubin, *ANC*, 52; Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 9; 17 December 2010.

83 Shubin, *ANC*, 52.

84 This list is derived from interviews with Sam Nujoma (4 March 2008), Helao Shityuwete (17 December 2010) and references to training sites in SWAPO and ANC literature.

85 Interviews with Ndeiwkila 9 February 2007, 1, 5; Kati, 4 August 2007, 4; Nashilongo, 11 December 2010; Shityuwete, 17 December 2010.

86 Shubin, *ANC*, 76-77.

them up at the railhead fifteen kilometres from Kongwa. Camp administrations established their own systems for recording information about humanitarian goods which entered the camps without oversight from Tanzanian officers at Kongwa.<sup>87</sup>

Similarly, liberation movement and Tanzanian officials mediated knowledge entering the camps from outside. When cadres returned from their training abroad to Kongwa, they brought with them overlapping, but not identical, bodies of knowledge about guerrilla warfare and revolutionary struggle. For example, while all cadres learned how to drill as part of their training, the counts and steps for drilling differed depending on where cadres had been trained. In this and other instances, standard practices had to be established for the armies to function effectively.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, ideas about 'the liberation struggle' and the nature of the enemy against which the liberation movements were struggling was far from identical across the countries which trained guerrillas and within the political leaderships of the movements themselves. Thus, an institution like Kurasini, the secondary school established by the African-American Institute in Dar es Salaam for southern African exiles, was identified at Kongwa both as a site which could 'liberate' the sub-continent and denounced as a threat to the liberation struggle.<sup>89</sup> In responding to such discrepancies, camp officials frequently used their command of camp space, especially the parade, to articulate official knowledge. And they relied upon the support of Shongambe and other Tanzanian officials when their authority to produce this knowledge was publicly contested.

This position – located between southern African nations living in exile and the global system of nation-states – granted officials administering Kongwa's camps considerable power. For example, it was rumoured that Tanzanian officials in Dar es Salaam were redirecting arms intended for the liberation movements to Biafra, Nigeria, where the Tanzanian government supported the secession movement.<sup>90</sup> SWAPO's leaders in Dar es Salaam were accused of selling clothing intended for 'Namibian refugees' in Tanzania.<sup>91</sup> Cash and commodities given by SWAPO leaders in Dar es Salaam to camp commanders were often never recorded in SWAPO's books at Kongwa, and rank-in-file soldiers suspected that their commanders were profiting from items which were intended for the rank-in-file.<sup>92</sup> Camp officials addressed these and other controversies in different ways, blaming them variously on 'South Africa', 'the West', 'whites', and 'spies' who had aligned themselves with such foreign agents. In so doing, they played to their own position of strength as elites with the power to represent a nation. And they obscured how they used this position to wield power over those at the margins of the international system living within their camps.

## Unraveling 'The Kongwa Crisis': Three Camp Histories

When seen from this international perspective, the tensions within SWAPO's Kongwa camp and their resolution appear different than they have in previous historiography. To date, published literature and most oral histories which acknowledge SWAPO's

---

87 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 8-10; 17 December 2010.

88 Interviews with Shityuwete, 17 December 2010; Joseph 'Pereb' Stephanus and Michael Kahuika, 20 September 2007, 4.

89 Interviews with Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 1; 25 August 2007, 25; Shikongo 26 July 2007, 19-20.

90 Shubin, *ANC*, 76-77.

91 Interview with Shipanga 20 March 2007, 1.

92 Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, 99; Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 3, 4, 10; Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 23; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 16.

internal conflicts during the 1960s refer to Kongwa not primarily as a camp for people displaced from a nation but rather as a national crisis. As sources indicate, 'the Kongwa Crisis' occurred following the return of seven guerrillas from military training in China in 1968. After spending several months in Tanzania, these seven wrote a memorandum, followed by a resignation letter, in which they raised a variety of complaints, accusing SWAPO officials of corruption, poor military strategy and, in the case of the then SWAPO military commander, Leonard Philemon 'Castro' Nangoloh, of spying for South Africa. Thereafter, the seven were driven to Dar es Salaam and imprisoned, making them among the first of many Namibians to be detained by SWAPO officials and front-line state governments over the next two decades.<sup>93</sup> In their discussion of this episode, scholars do make reference to the fact that it occurred at Kongwa, and Colin Leys and John Saul note that among the comrades' grievances were 'low level of organization', 'evidence of tribalism' and the use of 'preventive detention' in the SWAPO camp.<sup>94</sup> Authors do not consider, however, how such issues emerged in Kongwa's distinct social environment over nearly half a decade before 'the Crisis.' And they do not account for how the international relations in this environment structured the resolution of 'the Crisis.'

This section turns to these and related issues, unraveling them through three camp histories. The first history traces Namibians' motivations for travelling into exile from 1960 to 1966 and their encounters with a reality at Kongwa which often differed from their expectations. The second follows the migration into exile of a particular group of Namibians under the auspices of the Caprivi African National Union (CANU) and how mistrust developed between them and other Namibians as they lived together at Kongwa. The third narrates relations between the camp rank-in-file and 'Castro' who, in addition to being the most notorious spy in Namibian history, was also the senior camp commander at Kongwa during the mid-1960s. Importantly, these histories draw from the overlapping testimonies of people who occupied different positions in the SWAPO camp in the past and maintain diverse relationships to the Namibian nation, and its ruling party, in the present.<sup>95</sup> Together, they provide context for understanding how Namibian elites used their position in Kongwa's international community to wield power in consistent and patterned ways.

### *'Going Abroad'*

Well before 1968, SWAPO's Kongwa camp was a site of discontent for many who lived there. To understand this discontent, it is important to consider the circumstances in which people found themselves living in the camp. As previously noted, the majority of Namibians who entered Tanzania in the early and mid-1960s were contract workers recruited in Francistown, Bechuanaland. There SWAPO had established an office, under the direction of Maxton Joseph, which aimed to recruit workers travelling between northern Namibia and the South African

---

93 Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia*, 37-38; Leys and Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, 43-44; Hunter, *Die Politik der Erinnerung und des Vergessens in Namibia*, 77-80; Trehwela, *Inside Quatro*, 143, 189. In each of these texts, discussion of 'the Kongwa Crisis' is incorporated into a longer narrative of detentions and human rights abuses committed by SWAPO in exile.

94 Leys and Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*, 44.

95 Particularly, it should be noted that there are multiple perspectives on Kongwa which extend outside the parameters of the national narrative. In addition to working with people who have advanced a counter-narrative of Kongwa through 'the Kongwa Crisis', I also draw from former camp inhabitants whose experiences have not been included in this counter-narrative and whose knowledge of the camp circulates in distinct micro-communities. For further discussion of the social dynamics which shape the production of Kongwa's history see 'Exile History', 235-239.

Witwatersrand.<sup>96</sup> Most of those recruited were passing through Francistown as part of the migration route which the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) co-ordinated for its mine workers originating outside South Africa.<sup>97</sup> Others were contract workers and students inside Namibia who registered with WENELA so that they could make their way to Francistown and join the liberation movement in Tanzania from there.<sup>98</sup> Apparently, SWAPO officials who recruited exiles highlighted opportunities that would be available to Namibians who joined the liberation movement ‘abroad.’<sup>99</sup> These included the opportunity to study internationally, to live in Tanzania and other independent countries, and to contribute to Namibia’s liberation from colonial rule.<sup>100</sup> By presenting exile in this manner, recruiters appealed to a ‘tradition of mobility’ through which southern African men had, over generations, found ways to use the migrant labor system to access resources and opportunities otherwise denied to them.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, many of these early Namibian exiles, and probably many of the recruiters, had only a vague notion of what exiles would actually find in Tanzania. Apparently, some arrived in Dar es Salaam optimistic that they would be able to access scholarships regardless of their age or the extent of their education prior to travelling abroad. Also, a considerable number were unaware of SWAPO’s plans to organize for an armed struggle and that they might be enlisted as soldiers in a guerrilla army.<sup>102</sup>

It is, therefore, with surprise and reluctance that some Namibians found themselves at Kongwa. For many the encounter began upon their arrival in Dar es Salaam when they first met other Namibians living in the city. Among them were students at Kurasini who spoke with the newcomers about their impressions of life in exile. Apparently, students often discouraged newcomers from going to Kongwa and emphasized problems at the camp, such as poor living conditions and organization.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, few Namibians living in Tanzania had a choice in the matter. Those who had the necessary educational qualifications, fit within the age parameters and had received SWAPO’s endorsement were able to enroll in educational institutions in Tanzania.<sup>104</sup> The others, who were in the majority and who were required to associate with a liberation movement in order to live legally

---

96 In the Namibian literature only Tony Emmet draws attention to the importance of SWAPO’s Francistown office for recruiting most of the early Namibian exiles (Tony Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999), 331-332). All of my research participants who lived in exile during the 1960s emphasized the importance of the Francistown office. See, for example, Interviews with Samson Ndeikwila, 21 July 2007, 28; Nambinga Kati, 11 August 2007, 7-8; Helao Shityuwete, 14 December 2010.

97 WENELA recruited workers from all over southern Africa to work on the mines. Workers were registered in various WENELA offices and flown to Francistown from where they were transported by train to the Witwatersrand. The WENELA office in Namibia was located in Rundu, and most of those registered at WENELA’s Rundu office were Angolans, transported to Rundu from various locations inside Angola.

98 See, for example, Interviews with Samson Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 2 March 2007, 21 July 2007; Silas Shikongo, 16 March 2007; Kaufilwa Nepelilo, 3 August 2007.

99 In my interviews with former exiles, they often used the English word ‘abroad’ or expression ‘going abroad’ regardless of the language in which the interview was conducted. See, for example, Interview with Nepelilo, 4 August 2007.

100 Interviews with Ashipala, 16 March 2007; Hangula, 18 June 2011; Kati, 4 August 2007; Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007; Shikongo, 16 March 2007; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007.

101 Emmett, *Popular Resistance*, 332.

102 Emmett, *Popular Resistance*, 332; Interviews with Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 3; Hangula, 18 June 2011; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007; Shikongo, 16 March 2007.

103 Interviews with Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 5,6; Kati 11 August 2007, 16-17. Interestingly, Nepelilo maintains that Kurasini students discouraged him from going to Kongwa even as early as 1964 – well before some of the controversies in the camp.

104 To enter Kurasini students had to pass an aptitude test, have sufficient English language skills and fit within age parameters, which some former exiles remember as eighteen to twenty-five (Interviews with Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 25; Kati, 11 August 2007, 3; Ndeikwila, 2 March 2007, 3; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 18; Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf* (London: Kliptown Books, 1990), 96-97).

in Tanzania, were sent by SWAPO to Kongwa.<sup>105</sup> There, exiles were compelled to undergo military training regardless of whether becoming a ‘freedom fighter’ had been their intent or if they even supported the SWAPO leadership’s decision to take up an armed struggle.

Conditions in and around Kongwa further heightened some exiles’ sense of discontent. As sources emphasize, life at Kongwa could be harsh. Camp inhabitants often lived without basic commodities,<sup>106</sup> and their movements and speech were monitored and restricted. At the same time, camp inhabitants’ access to resources entering the camp from outside was uneven, and the confined living space of the camp made such inequalities difficult to hide. For example, rank-in-file soldiers made requests for pocket money, but their requests were repeatedly denied – despite the fact that commanders who denied them clearly had access to money which they were using to purchase items in Kongwa village.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, camp commanders warned soldiers against drinking excessively and having sexual relationships with women even as some repeatedly did not report to the parade and were not found in the camp after nights in the location.<sup>108</sup> SWAPO’s senior camp commanders at Kongwa, it should be further noted, were contract workers with little or no formal education just like most of those whom they were commanding in the camp. Moreover, most of the rank-in-file soldiers were over thirty years of age and were roughly the same age as their commanders.<sup>109</sup> In the eyes of some at Kongwa, commanders’ authority over the camp was based solely on their having arrived in exile first and received positions by the SWAPO leaders – not on their legitimacy to govern those inhabiting the camp.<sup>110</sup>

Especially troubling for some newcomers at Kongwa were instances in which camp commanders dismissed SWAPO leaders who encouraged Namibians to study. For example, in 1964 SWAPO Secretary General Jacob Kuhangua visited Kongwa and informed the Namibians there about opportunities to study at Kurasini which might soon become available to the camp’s younger inhabitants, regardless of their previous education.<sup>111</sup> Those who passed their studies at Kurasini, Kuhangua stressed, could receive scholarships to study in the United States of America. Apparently, Kuhangua’s words were received by some camp inhabitants with great enthusiasm, but commanders took to referring to Kuhangua and the Kurasini students as ‘stooges’ set on undermining the Namibian revolution.<sup>112</sup> While discussion of the ideological differences among the SWAPO leadership took place away from the camp parade ground, it was clear to many that their aspirations to study had become entangled in Cold War divisions which aligned the camp commanders with the Soviet bloc and against Kuhangua and some other SWAPO leaders.<sup>113</sup>

---

105 This point is confirmed by all of my Kongwa research participants as well as Tony Emmett. As he writes, ‘It was essentially those for whom scholarships could not be obtained who formed the nucleus of the SWAPO guerrilla force’ (Emmett, *Popular Resistance*, 332). And this guerrilla force was based at Kongwa.

106 See, for example, Interviews with Kati, 11 August 2007, 1-2; Shikongo, 22 July 2007, 19.

107 Interview with Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 16.

108 Interviews with Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 5; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 3; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 10.

109 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 18; Kati, 11 August 2007, 1.

110 See, for example, Interview with Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 7, 9.

111 Interviews with Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 1, 25 July 2007, 25; Shikongo, 22 July 2007, 19-20.

112 Interviews with Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 25; Hangula, 18 June 2011.

113 For a discussion of Cold War divisions within the SWAPO leadership and how they appeared to different people at the camp, see Interviews with Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 25; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 15-16; Hangula, 18 June 2011.

It is in this international context, at once local and global, that some of the first Namibians began to resist the camp order and confront officials at Kongwa. Among these early dissidents was Silas Shikongo. Like others attending St. Mary's Mission School in Odibo during the early 1960s, Shikongo was recruited by Peter Nanyemba, then SWAPO's Representative for East Africa, to leave Namibia to seek further studies through the liberation movement in exile. By 1964 Shikongo was living in a camp for southern African refugees on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam where he waited for SWAPO to arrange a scholarship for him. Sometime thereafter, possibly in response to the Tanzanian government's efforts to reduce the number of liberation movement members living around Dar es Salaam,<sup>114</sup> Shikongo was sent by SWAPO to Kongwa. As Shikongo emphasizes, SWAPO took him and about fifty other Namibians from the refugee camp at night without any prior notice that they were to be sent to Kongwa.<sup>115</sup> In response, Shikongo attempted to address camp officials in the hope that he, like some other young Namibians, would be permitted to leave the camp and further his studies. Repeatedly, however, he found his efforts thwarted. To account for his misfortune, Shikongo explains that after arriving at Kongwa, Tobias Hainyeko, the commander of the camp and of the South West African Liberation Army (SWALA), learned that Shikongo descended from a royal family that was closely associated with the South African government and its efforts to establish apartheid homelands in Namibia.<sup>116</sup> Hainyeko was, therefore, unwilling to support Shikongo's search for scholarships or allow him audience with SWAPO officials in Dar es Salaam on the premise that if he were granted a scholarship that he might 'just fly from there ... to see [his] father'.<sup>117</sup> Shikongo, in turn, attempted to subvert the camp command by smuggling a letter to SWAPO President Sam Nujoma, who originates from a village neighboring Shikongo's in the Ongandjera region of Ovamboland and knew Shikongo personally. Nujoma eventually did come to the camp to announce that those who were interested in taking up further studies should register their names. But the response from the political leadership was slow and, according to Shikongo, he and others tired of waiting and began to express their discontent in new ways.<sup>118</sup>

Towards the end of 1965, Silas Shikongo decided to stop taking orders from the camp commanders: 'I must not go to cook; I must not go for the morning marching or morning [parade]; I must not go to the camp gate at nighttime.'<sup>119</sup> Although Shikongo emphasizes that his 'strike' was a personal choice and lasted for about three months,<sup>120</sup> there were also clearly others who were not following the camp rules at this time, and some who had fled the camp at night and not returned.<sup>121</sup> In response,

---

114 According to Helao Shityuwete (Interview, 24 July 2007, 18) and Vladimir Shubin (*ANC: A View from Moscow*, 54), from 1964 the Tanzanian government limited the number of liberation movement members in Dar es Salaam to registered students and four or five representatives administering movement offices. All others had to be sent elsewhere. Shityuwete suggests that the impetus for this regulation was the January 1964 coup attempt against Nyerere's government.

115 Interviews with Shikongo, 16 March 2007, 4; 22 July 2007, 14.

116 Shikongo's father was a chief in Ongandjera and his father's youngest brother, Ushona Shiimi, became the first Chief Councillor of the Ovamboland Homeland from 1968-1972.

117 Interview with Shikongo, 22 July 2007, 5.

118 Eventually, SWAPO did send a group of twenty Namibians, who had registered to study during Nujoma's visit at Kongwa, to Mbeya. There they were administered a test. Those who passed were sent to Kurasini to study while those who failed were sent back to Kongwa or detained at Keko Prison (Interviews with Shikongo, 22 July 2007, 21; Nashilongo, 11 December 2010; Hangula 18 June 2011). For a personal account of how the SWAPO leadership handled those who failed the test at Mbeya, see Interview with Hangula, 18.6.2011.

119 Interview with Shikongo, 22 July 2007, 7.

120 Interviews with Silas Shikongo, 6 June 2011, 8 June 2011.

121 Interview with Shikongo, 22 July 2007, 18-19; most of my Kongwa research participant who lived in the camp in 1966 discuss these events. Shikongo narrates them in relationship to his own strike (Interview with Shikongo, 22 July 2007, 7, 18-19).

Tobias Hainyeko and Major Shongambebe decided to call a meeting of all Namibians at Kongwa in the SWAPO camp office in January 1966.<sup>122</sup> There, Shongambebe asked those assembled to explain the situation in the camp and express their concerns. Shikongo was among three rank-in-file soldiers who spoke and explained that their purpose for entering exile was to study, that they had been taken to Kongwa against their will, and that they felt they were being mistreated in the camp.<sup>123</sup> Related issues were also introduced such as Hainyeko's alleged prejudice against Shikongo, and Shikongo's work in the camp logistics office, from where he had distributed fresh milk and other items to those who claimed dietary needs that were not recognized by the commanders.<sup>124</sup> In making these statements at the meeting, Shikongo appealed to Shongambebe to intervene in injustices at the camp or at least to bring them to the attention of other SWAPO officials, such as Peter Nanyemba and Jacob Kuhangua whom many aspiring students saw as allies but who remained distant from Kongwa at SWAPO's Dar es Salaam offices. Instead, Tanzanian officials escorted Shikongo and his two outspoken comrades the same night to Dar es Salaam's Keko Prison where they spent the next six months in detention.<sup>125</sup>

Shikongo was among the first Namibians to be detained for openly criticizing camp officials at Kongwa,<sup>126</sup> but multiple confrontations and detentions followed in the camp over the next five years. Setbacks in Namibia's liberation struggle are clearly an important context for understanding many of these incidents. Although the first group of SWALA guerrillas (G1) managed to infiltrate Namibia from Kongwa in 1965, the second group (G2) was arrested by the South African Police in Namibia's Kavango Region in May 1966.<sup>127</sup> Thereafter, several groups which entered Namibia were captured<sup>128</sup> and, following the first skirmish between SWALA and the South African Police at Ongulumbashe on 26 August 1966, South Africa arrested thirty-seven leading SWAPO members, who were then tried under the Terrorism Act of 1967. These developments brought SWAPO's efforts to infiltrate guerrillas into Namibia and to recruit more Namibians for its liberation army to a standstill. By the late 1960s SWAPO's Kongwa camp had become an outpost for trained Namibians who were not actively involved in an armed struggle, and many began to avoid camp activities and fled from the camp.<sup>129</sup> The Seven Comrades were among those who challenged the status quo at Kongwa at this time, differentiating themselves from others by confronting SWAPO's camp leadership and Shongambebe's office with a written memorandum aimed at addressing the problems in the camp.

Nevertheless, it is easy to overlook the fact that tensions between the rank-in-file and commanders at SWAPO's Kongwa camp preceded SWAPO's military collapse and shaped the Seven Comrades' memorandum. From as early as 1964, some Namibians living at Kongwa were dissatisfied with their placement at a camp that constrained their access to opportunities which they had hoped to find in exile. Increasingly, they resented the commanders who were responsible for monitoring

---

122 Interviews with Shikongo, 16 March 2007, 7; 22 July 2007, 18.

123 The other speakers were Lazarus Pohamba and Valentin Katumbe.

124 Interview with Shikongo, 22 July 2007, 18.

125 Interview with Shikongo, 22 July 2007, 8.

126 Interviews with Shikongo, 16 March 2007, 22 July 2007; Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 31; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 15.

127 Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance*, 59-60; Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 159-162, 170-171; Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, 101-130.

128 The arrest of subsequent groups is confirmed by former Kongwa inhabitants interviews and by Sam Nujoma (*Where Others Wavered*, 172-173).

129 It appears that order at Kongwa dissolved in 1967. See, for example, Interview with Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 33-35.

their lives inside the camp and who were better able to access a world outside of it. When Shikongo and others resisted their place in the camp order by disobeying rules and appealing to Major Shongambe, they again discovered the vulnerability of their position – beholden to a Tanzanian official mediating relations between an exiled liberation movement and the government which supported it. Only later, when rank-in-file Namibians managed to forge their own social networks with people outside the camp, were some able to access the study opportunities which had enticed many of them to travel ‘abroad.’ As one former camp inhabitant recalls, during the mid-1960s Jackson Kambode, a SWAPO official living in Dar es Salaam, left the liberation movement and travelled to Nairobi where he began to study with a scholarship accessed through the United Nations. Eventually, word of Kambode’s scholarship reached Kongwa and the first Namibians there began to make their way to Kenya.<sup>130</sup> To encourage their comrades to join them and facilitate their travel, Namibia’s first Kenya exiles corresponded with those still at Kongwa through a Tanzanian whom they had befriended in Kongwa village and who helped smuggle letters in and out of the camp on their behalfs.<sup>131</sup> By the early 1970s there were more than fifty Namibians living in Nairobi.<sup>132</sup> Most of them had once lived at Kongwa, including Silas Shikongo who, following his release from Keko Prison, eventually made his way to Kenya and secured a scholarship.<sup>133</sup>

### *Caprivi African National Union (CANU)*

In addition to those whom SWAPO officials recruited to join the liberation movement in Tanzania during the 1960s, some Namibians travelled abroad under the auspices of other organizations. Among these organizations was CANU. Founded by school teachers in Namibia’s Caprivi Region in September 1962, CANU managed to mobilize support among a range of teachers, students and traditional leaders in the Caprivi over the next two years.<sup>134</sup> Following a student strike at Catholic Mission School in Katima Mulilo and the arrest of CANU President Brendan Simbwaye in 1964, as many as seventy CANU members fled across the Zambezi River into Zambia.<sup>135</sup> Several months later, in Lusaka, leaders from CANU and SWAPO agreed to merge the two organizations and Brendan Simbwaye and Mishake Muyongo were appointed SWAPO Vice President and SWAPO Representative to Zambia, respectively.<sup>136</sup> In December 1964 and January 1965 SWAPO made arrangements to transport the exiled Caprivians, most of whom

130 Interview with Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 35.

131 Interview with Ashipala, 25 July 2006, 35.

132 For more details on the Namibian exile community in Kenya, see Interviews with Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 1-2, 25 July 2007, 35; Ndeikwila, 21 July 2007, 38-40, 13 May 2011. It should be noted that Namibians at Kongwa also migrated from Tanzania to other countries including Uganda, Ethiopia and Somalia (Interviews with Ashipala, 16 March 2007, 2; Kati 11 August 2007, 12, 15; Ndeikwila, 2 September 2007, 13 May 2011).

133 Shikongo was released from Keko Prison in July 1966. After learning that SWAPO might send him again to Kongwa, he made his way to Mbeya where he passed an examination, qualifying him to attend Kurasini. In 1970 Shikongo moved on to Nairobi, where he joined other Namibians already studying there (Interviews with Shikongo, 16 March 2007, 10-11, 8 June 2011).

134 Albert Zechariah Ndopu, Interview with Beauty Matongo, 27 February 2011, 7-13. Ndopu’s detailed narrative of the formation of CANU corrects Peter Katjavivi’s assertion that CANU was established in 1963 (*A History of Resistance in Namibia*, 51).

135 Interview with Ndopu, 27 February 2011, 9-13; Frederick Matongo, Interview with Beauty Matongo, 13 March 2011, 19-20; Interviews with Frederick Matongo, 18 June 2011, 1-2; Ellen Musialela, 24 July 2008; Samson Ndeikwila, 2 March 2007, 13, 15. As Matongo, one of the students involved in the strike, indicates, people crossed into Zambia in small groups, and many of the students arrived there before Simbwaye’s arrest in July 1964.

136 Interview with Ndopu, 27 February 2011, 13-15; Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, 51. By the time of the official merger Simbwaye had been detained by South African Security Forces. He is believed to have died in detention. During the 1970s Muyongo became the Acting Vice President of SWAPO before he was expelled from the organization in 1980.

had congregated in refugee camps in southwestern Zambia and had not participated in the negotiations which merged CANU with SWAPO, to Tanzania.<sup>137</sup> There, in the southwestern Tanzanian town of Mbeya, the Caprivians were divided into two groups, with a smaller group sent to Dar es Salaam for further schooling and a larger group sent to Kongwa for military training.<sup>138</sup>

The arrival of the Caprivians at Kongwa changed the social dynamics within SWAPO's camp significantly. The great majority of the 100 to 200 Namibians who had previously inhabited Kongwa were Oshiwambo speakers from north-central Namibia and others who shared similar languages and cultural practices from Namibia's Kavango Region.<sup>139</sup> Thus, upon their arrival in the camp, the Caprivians became a large ethnic minority. Not only did the newcomers speak languages which were unintelligible to those previously residing in the camp, but they shared relatively little common history with their new neighbours. Although they lived within the same colonial boundaries, Caprivians had not been incorporated into the German and South African colonial economies through the contract labour system as had people from the Ovambo and Kavango Regions, and many had schooled and worked in southwestern Zambia alongside Zambians with whom they shared overlapping pasts and cultural affinities. Moreover, the idea of creating CANU had been generated not through exchanges with Namibian nationalists, but rather with Zambian nationalists – particularly the United National Independence Party (UNIP) whose leaders Caprivians met regularly during the early 1960s and on whose model CANU drafted its constitution.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, the social backgrounds of the particular groups from Caprivi and Ovambo/Kavango sent to Kongwa differed considerably. Many of the Caprivians had been educated in mission schools and spoke English whereas most others in the camp, including the established camp commanders, did not.<sup>141</sup> Thus, initially, the Caprivians shared no common language with their new neighbours, and they were accommodated in separate tents, further reinforcing the sense that the camp was composed of two distinct ethnic/political groups.<sup>142</sup>

It is in this context that a conflict began to unfold between 'CANU' and 'SWAPO' at Kongwa.<sup>143</sup> According to Frederick Matongo, one of the first cohort of Caprivian exiles, tensions emerged just before their arrival at the camp when a SWAPO representative came to collect Caprivians assigned to Kongwa at the Dodoma train station:

---

137 Interviews with Ndopu, 27 February 2011, 13-15; F. Matongo, 13 March 2011, 19-20, 18 June 2011, 3-4. Moreover, Ndopu, who during the early 1960s was CANU's Public Secretary, maintains that the CANU delegation sent to Lusaka in July 1964 was not sent by the exiled CANU leadership to meet with SWAPO. Rather, their mission was to update members of the United National Independence Party and the United Nations on developments in the Caprivi. He and other members of the CANU leadership waiting in the camp for the delegation's return were, therefore, 'amazed' and 'irritated' when they learned that SWAPO and CANU had merged (Interview with Ndopu 27 February 2011, 14).

138 Interviews with Ndopu, 27 February 2011, 15; F. Matongo 13 March 2011, 20, 18 June 2011, 2.

139 Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, 99-100; Interview with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 1-2. In addition, camp inhabitants included a few Otjherero speakers who had been recruited from the Herero community in Bechuanaland and from sometime in the middle of 1965 the Angolans recruited by Jonas Savimbi.

140 Interview with Ndopu, 27 February 2011.

141 Interviews with F. Matongo, 13 March 2011, 20; 18 June 2011, 2; Ndeikwila, 2 March 2007, 15; Shityuwete, 14 December 2010. It should be noted that some Oshiwambo speaking camp inhabitants had been educated at mission schools (such as St. Mary's in Odibo) where English was the medium of instruction, but the vast majority, including most of the camp commanders, had accessed little or no formal education.

142 Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010. In 1965 rank-in-file guerrillas at Kongwa were accommodated in tents, with concrete structures reserved for the commanders (Interview with Hangula, 18 June 2011). By 1967 all the Namibians at Kongwa were accommodated in concrete barracks although the barracks of the Caprivians and other Namibians at Kongwa remained separate (Interviews with Ndeikwila, 2 March 2007, 19; 21 July 2007, 25; 17 June 2011).

143 As noted, CANU did not officially exist as a separate organization from SWAPO in 1965. Nevertheless, the terms 'CANU' and 'SWAPO' and the related ethnic/regional labels 'Caprivian' and 'Ovambo' were used by those involved in the conflict.

When we hear[d] the name Kongwa, we were puzzled because at that time there was a war ... in Congo Kinshasa ... For us the two names 'Kongwa' and 'Congo' [sounded] the same ... [Before] that time in our lives we had never before [been] mixed with other Namibians such as Ovambo[s] ... We could not speak Oshiwambo and Afrikaans; the Ovambos could not speak Subia and English ... The people who came to collect us arrived in the morning but we were just refusing to go until at around 4 [pm]. Then Green[well Matongo]<sup>144</sup> said, 'Let's just go. Once we reach the border we shall see words on the board, telling us that we are now entering this country... If we see it is Congo, we shall not cross the border.'<sup>145</sup>

Eventually Matongo's group arrived at Kongwa (not Congo) and took up training in the camp, but their relationship with their Oshiwambo speaking commanders continued to be dogged by language divides and related issues. Sources suggest that the SWAPO commanders did little to make the newcomers from Caprivi feel welcome in the camp and that some of the Caprivians questioned the credentials of their new commanders, whom they thought, as representatives of a nationalist movement, should be able to speak English.<sup>146</sup> Commanders, on the other hand, seem to have mistrusted the intentions of some Caprivian leaders, whom they suspected were not committed to SWAPO but had only merged with SWAPO so that they could resurrect CANU in Tanzania.<sup>147</sup> For some months these tensions remained outside Kongwa's public discourse, but events in the middle of 1965 brought them to the surface. According to some accounts, Mishake Muyongo travelled from his office to Kongwa where he organized a special meeting with other Caprivians, hatching his plans to revive CANU and sowing the seeds for an open rebellion.<sup>148</sup> Camp minutes, while not dismissing Muyongo's role as instigator, offer another narrative, grounded in the circumstances of camp daily life.<sup>149</sup> As Titus Muailpeni, one of the commanders, narrates: 'One night some of [the Caprivian] comrades arrived from the village under liquor influence, [sic] they were insulting, swearing, cursing and saying all bad languages ... [about] the SWAPO leaders.' In response, some of the camp commanders threatened to fight the Caprivians. As one Caprivian reports, a commander 'came ... in our tent with a stick in his hand [with] the intention to do harm to us.'<sup>150</sup>

---

144 Greenwell Matongo, nephew to Frederick Matongo, later became the Chief Political Commissar of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia and one of the best known SWAPO guerrilla commanders. He died in 1979 when his car drove over a land-mine.

145 Interview with Matongo, 13 March 2011, 20.

146 Interviews with Ndeikwila, 13 May 2011; F. Matongo, 13 March 2011, 20-21; 18 June 2011, 2. It should be noted that, in Matongo's account, the language barrier between Caprivians and Ovambos became less divisive after the Caprivians spent time with their new comrades in the camp. In contrast, Ndeikwila and several other former Kongwa inhabitants maintain that language was an on-going source of division among Namibians at Kongwa.

147 Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010.

148 Interviews with F. Matongo, 18 June 2011, 4; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 13.

149 University of Namibia, Katjavivi Collection, Series B1, Category 5, File No. 9, 'The National Executive Committee of SWAPO held 21/9/65 at 8.10 A.M. Under the Chairmanship of Leonard Philemon First D.D.C Chief Under Secretary of Josep Shitwete', [henceforth 'Minutes 21/9/65'], 5-6. It should be noted that these minutes are the only ones available from Kongwa in the Katjavivi Collection or any of the other major archives of SWAPO material which I have been able to access. According to Helao Shityuwete, who took the minutes himself, he was one of the first literate commanders at Kongwa and initiated the practice of keeping camp minutes after arriving in the camp and being appointed 'Third Secretary' in the middle of 1965. He maintains that this meeting is the only one at Kongwa involving the top SWAPO leadership while he lived in the camp and indicates that he wrote the minutes by hand and then gave them to Sam Nujoma's personal secretary, Ewald Katjivena, who probably typed them (Interview with Helao Shityuwete, 5 June 2008).

150 Minutes 21/9/65, 5-6.

By September 1965, many of the Caprivians at Kongwa had gone 'on strike' by disobeying the commanders and disregarding organized camp activities.<sup>151</sup> On 21 September high-ranking SWAPO leaders, including President Sam Nujoma, gathered at Kongwa to speak with the camp commanders about 'the problem of the Caprivians'.<sup>152</sup> As the meeting minutes demonstrate, 'the problem' posed SWAPO officials with several dilemmas. Although Major Shongambeke had offered to deport the Caprivians on the premise that they were only allowed to remain in Tanzania if they cooperated with SWAPO, a recognized liberation movement,<sup>153</sup> deportation was fraught with risks. It could poison SWAPO's reputation in the Caprivi Region and result in deportees revealing information about Kongwa and other military secrets to 'the Boers'.<sup>154</sup> On the other hand, if SWAPO officials tried to enlist the support of Caprivians who were by then representing SWAPO in its offices abroad, there was no guarantee that they would cooperate or that the Caprivians at Kongwa would listen to them. This mistrust of the Caprivians manifested itself at the meeting when Mishake Muyongo, who was in attendance but remained outside the office while the Ovambo commanders discussed 'the problem of the Caprivians', was asked to enter and profess his loyalty to SWAPO. Although Muyongo claimed that he would inform his fellow Caprivians 'to obey all orders given ... by SWAPO officials or the Tanzanian Government', some SWAPO officials maintained that Muyongo's words were disingenuous and that he had ulterior motives. As Nujoma and others alleged, Muyongo had used SWAPO's Lusaka office to distribute letters to the OAU Liberation Committee, the Zambian government and UNIP complaining about how the SWAPO leadership was treating Caprivians.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, neither Muyongo nor the other Caprivians at the camp were forthcoming about the location of George Mutwah and Nalishua Tongo, the supposed ringleaders of the strike, who had disappeared from the camp sometime before the meeting. Some speculated that Muyongo had only traveled to Tanzania for the meeting so that he could meet secretly with Mutwah and Tongo and plan CANU's next move.<sup>156</sup>

Despite these dilemmas, SWAPO's international recognition and the instruments which this recognition gave the liberation movement to control Namibians at Kongwa granted SWAPO officials considerable power over the CANU dissidents in its camp. Whereas CANU was not officially recognized by the organizations to which Mishake Muyongo wrote, SWAPO was recognized by all of them and by the Tanzanian government as well. And SWAPO drew from these support networks and the instruments which they allowed SWAPO to exercise at Kongwa to 'resolve' the CANU issue.

---

151 Ibid., 5, 8. The camp minutes and other sources refer uniformly to the strike of 'the Caprivians', but some of the Caprivians at Kongwa did not participate in it. As Frederick Matongo emphasizes, after the meeting with Muyongo, he and some other Caprivians who attended actually reported the meeting's content to the Tanzanian authorities and never went on strike (Interview with Matongo, 18 June 2011).

152 Minutes 21/9/65, 1. Interestingly, Shityuwete points to another conflict within the camp which he believes was the main purpose of Nujoma's visit. See the section of this paper titled 'Castro' below.

153 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 13-14, 23; 14 December 2010.

154 Minutes 21/9/65, 2-3.

155 Minutes, 21/9/65, 7; Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010.

156 Minutes 21/9/65, 7-9.

Sometime after the camp meeting George Mutwah and Nalishua Tongo were arrested by Tanzanian officials in Dar es Salaam and detained at Keko Prison.<sup>157</sup> At roughly the same time, Caprivians who remained committed to the strike refused to eat and moved their tents outside the physical space of the camp.<sup>158</sup> In turn, SWAPO officials used their control over camp resources to coax those on the outside to return inside, allegedly promising them food and protection from the more ‘radical’ Caprivians<sup>159</sup> while threatening those who refused to cooperate with sjamboks.<sup>160</sup> Within a few weeks, most or all the Caprivians living outside the camp had returned inside with their tents. As for Mishake Muyongo, he returned to Zambia where he continued to represent SWAPO at the Lusaka Office.

Despite the outward appearance of a resolution, some Namibians who lived at Kongwa during the late 1960s maintain that the CANU issue in the camp was never resolved. According to Samson Ndeikwila, an ethnic Ovambo who arrived at Kongwa in 1967, the Caprivians he came to know while living at the camp felt that they were unwelcome within SWAPO and that their group leaders had been imprisoned unjustly.<sup>161</sup> Certainly, their barracks were set up in a different section of the camp and they tended to socialize separately from the other Namibians.<sup>162</sup> Thus, when Ndeikwila and the other ‘Comrades’ who arrived in 1968 wrote their memorandum, they drew attention to ‘evidence of tribalism’ at Kongwa and the fates of George Mutwah and Nalishua Tongo – before the Comrades too were arrested.

### ‘Castro’

On 21 September 21 1965, the date when SWAPO officials met at Kongwa, ‘the problem of the Caprivians’ was not the only issue on their agenda. Although the camp minutes report exclusively on the Caprivi conflict, the author of those minutes, Helao Shityuwete, maintains that there was another issue in the camp which had compelled the leaders to travel from Dar es Salaam. At the centre of this issue was the then Second-in-Command of SWALA and senior camp commander, Leonard Philemon ‘Castro’ Nangolo.<sup>163</sup>

A member of the group which established SWAPO’s forerunner in Cape Town during the late 1950s,<sup>164</sup> Castro travelled to Tanzania in 1962 and from there was sent by SWAPO to Egypt to receive training as one of the first seven SWALA guerrillas. After finishing another training course in the Soviet Union, Castro returned to Tanzania to found the SWAPO camp at Kongwa.<sup>165</sup> For those Namibians who were not satisfied with their lives at Kongwa, Castro soon became a focal point of

---

157 Interviews with Hangula, 18 June 2011; Nashilongo, 11 December 2010. Hangula and Nashilongo were also detained at Keko and offer perspectives on Mutwah and Tongo’s arrest based, allegedly, on conversations that they had while they were all imprisoned together. According to Hangula, Mutwah and Tongo escaped from Kongwa and travelled to the SWAPO office in Dar es Salaam to present their grievances – only to be arrested when the SWAPO leaders who were called on the Tanzanian police for assistance. Testimony in the camp minutes appears to corroborate Hangula’s point (Minutes 21/9/65, 7).

158 Inhabitants at Kongwa in 1965 often refer to the Caprivians’ strike as a ‘hunger strike’, but Shityuwete maintains that the Caprivians did not refuse to eat until after the September 21 meeting (Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010).

159 Interview with Shityuwete, 14 December 2010.

160 Interview with Hangula, 18 June 2011.

161 Interviews with Ndeikwila, 2 September 2007, 5; 2 March 2007, 19, 21.

162 Interviews with Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 5; Shikongo, 26 July 2007, 20; Nepalilo, 4 August 2007, 13.

163 Interviews with Shityuwete, 5 June 2008; 14 December 2010.

164 The name of this forerunner was the Ovamboland People’s Congress before becoming the Ovamboland People’s Organization (OPO) in 1959 and, finally, SWAPO in 1960.

165 Leonard Philemon ‘Castro’ Nangolo, ‘My History’, 1994 (a gift to the author); Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 158-159; Interview with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 24.

criticism, blamed for abusing the power which he wielded over Namibians living in the camp. For example, Castro was associated with a regime of discipline and deference to authority in the camp which treated camp inhabitants like 'permanent soldiers' rather than as 'comrades' in a liberation struggle.<sup>166</sup> Castro set the rules when camp inhabitants were required to be inside the camp and report to the parade and yet he often absconded from the parade and spent nights in the location, where some believed he was sleeping with local women.<sup>167</sup> Castro was also blamed for some commanders' practice of diverting aid to the camp and selling it to the people living around Kongwa for self-enrichment.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, Castro was among the camp commanders who did not speak English and whom some Caprivians at Kongwa saw as antagonistic towards them.

Sources suggest that some Namibians at Kongwa were dissatisfied with Castro from the camp's early days and that rank-file guerrillas had tried to raise their concerns with Major Shongambe at a camp meeting before September 1965.<sup>169</sup> The September 1965 meeting, however, reflected a significant, new conjuncture of events. In May of that year, three new groups of guerrillas returned from military training in Algeria, Egypt and Ghana to Kongwa. Upon their return, the leaders of these groups, including Dimo Hamaambo, Caleb Tjipahura and Helao Shityuwete,<sup>170</sup> became responsible for training newcomers to the camp and, in the process, began challenging the status quo. New activities were organized, attendance at the parade was carefully recorded, and soldiers were encouraged to drop salutes and other formal practices which reinforced the hierarchy within the camp.<sup>171</sup> In response, Castro contacted the SWAPO head office in Dar es Salaam and a meeting was scheduled with SWAPO leaders which would address the tension between the camp commanders as well as the Caprivi issue.<sup>172</sup> According to Helao Shityuwete, President Nujoma opened the meeting by asking Castro to speak about the problems at the camp and with Castro insinuating that the newcomers were instigating the rank-in-file 'to rebel against [Castro] and his other commanders'. In response, Hamaambo, Tjipahura and Shityuwete explained their dissatisfaction with the conditions they found at the camp – points that were strengthened, apparently, when Peter Hambiya, the SWAPO Secretary based in Dar es Salaam, checked the camp books against his own, discovering that there were items intended for Kongwa inhabitants which had not been registered in the books. Thereafter, Hamaambo, Tjipahura and Shityuwete were each appointed to formal positions in the camp command alongside Castro, who retained the position of senior camp commander.<sup>173</sup>

The September 1965 meeting may have temporarily addressed the Castro issue at Kongwa, but it soon emerged again – albeit in an expanded context. In February 1966 Castro was selected as a member of Group 2 (G2), the second group of SWALA

---

166 Interviews with Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 23; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 2, 5; *Never Follow the Wolf*, 99.

167 Interviews with Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 10; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 3; 14 December 2010; Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, 99.

168 Interviews with Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 23, 28–29; Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 3, 4, 10; Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, 99.

169 Interview with Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 23–24, 27–28, 28–29.

170 Interview Dimo Hamaambo was the leader of the group trained in Algeria and went on to become the Commander of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia, the successor to SWALA.

171 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 2; Ashipala, 25 July 2007, 27–28.

172 Shityuwete maintains that the main issue on the agenda for the meeting was, in fact, the disagreement between the commanders and that the commanders themselves might have resolved the Caprivi issue on their own, with the help of the Tanzanian government, if Castro had not contacted the head office to draw attention to the conflict between the commanders (Interview with Shityuwete, 5 June 2008).

173 Interviews with Shityuwete, 24 July 2007, 3–4; 5 June 2008.

guerrillas which departed from Kongwa to infiltrate Namibia. Three months later, Castro's group was arrested by the South African Police in Namibia's Kavango Region as were the members of several subsequent groups which travelled from Kongwa to Namibia.<sup>174</sup> As Kongwa inhabitants learned about these arrests, rumours spread that they were being led unwittingly to their capture through the work of a South African agent or agents. Suspicions focused on Castro, who had somehow managed to return to Tanzania after the G2 group was captured and had been involved in planning the movements of the subsequent groups which had travelled from Kongwa to Namibia. Although Castro maintained that he escaped his captors after his arrest, others suspected that he had negotiated his release and was responsible for the capture of guerrillas and for other major setbacks which SWAPO experienced in late 1966 and 1967.<sup>175</sup> A turning point in Kongwa inhabitants' perception of Castro appears to have been a meeting at the SWAPO parade in 1967 when members of SWAPO and the ANC gathered to hear Castro speak about Omgulumbashe and SWAPO's other military operations inside Namibia. According to one source, guerrillas questioned the truthfulness of Castro's story because, when he delivered it, he omitted important details and was 'shivering' as if he were panicked to speak on this topic.<sup>176</sup>

Thus, by the time the Seven Comrades entered Kongwa in 1968, rumours were circulating that Castro was a spy and the Comrades' memorandum discusses Castro exclusively in relation to these rumours. In so doing, however, it and other literature on 'the Kongwa Crisis' overlook the more mundane aspects of camp life which were initially the focus of criticisms of Castro and which enabled him to wield power over Namibians in similar ways across the 1960s. By controlling the camp's boundaries and breaking his own rules, by siphoning aid from foreign donors, and, perhaps, by becoming a double agent for South Africa, Castro abused his privileged access to the international community supporting Kongwa camp. When rank-in-file Namibians tried to initiate a discussion about Castro beyond the camp, they were faced with their own marginal status in this community. Although the Seven Comrades requested an audience with their leaders in Dar es Salaam, when they presented their memorandum to SWAPO commanders and Tanzanian officials at Kongwa, the Tanzanian police drove them directly to the Dar es Salaam Police Station, where they were detained for six months before being sent to Keko for an additional nine months of imprisonment.<sup>177</sup> In early 1969 Castro himself was imprisoned at Keko, where he remained for the next seventeen years, leading some former exiles to speculate that the Comrades' memorandum prompted an investigation, proving Castro's spying activities.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, for Namibians then living at Kongwa, the Castro issue remained unresolved since the reasons for Castro's arrest, the information which he revealed to the South African government, and the people who assisted him in his work were still unclear. Apparently, rumours about Castro and his collaboration with other SWAPO leaders were a central issue in 1971, when a

---

174 For information about G2, see the accounts of G2 member Helao Shityuwete (*Never Follow the Wolf*, 101-130) and Sam Nujoma (*Where Others Wavered*, 170-171). The arrest of subsequent groups is confirmed by former Kongwa inhabitants interviewed and by Nujoma (*Where Others Wavered*, 172-173).

175 Among the events widely attributed to Castro are the arrest of OPC/OPO founder Andimba Toivo Ya Toivo in 1966, Ya Toivo's later imprisonment on Robben Island, and the death of SWALA Commander Tobias Hainyeko who was killed in a shoot out along the Zambezi River outside Katima Mulilo on 18 May 18 1967.

176 Interviews with Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 3; 21 July 2007, 34, 35.

177 Interviews with Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007, 3-4; 21 July 2007, 41-42; 17 June 2011; Kati, 11 August 2007, 5-6; 16 June 2011. After their release from Keko, the Seven Comrades were sent to a refugee settlement in rural northern Tanzania known as Ndebaro from where they escaped in early 1970 and made their way to Kenya.

178 Interviews with Kati, 11 August 2007, 9; Ndeikwila, 9 February 2007; Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 20-24.

riot broke out in the SWAPO camp and all the Namibians there were removed from the site.<sup>179</sup> Only in 1974, when a new generation with no prior experience of Castro or of Kongwa joined SWAPO in exile, did the liberation movement re-open its Kongwa camp.

## Conclusion

As these histories suggest, Kongwa is a significant site for studying the formation of Namibia. There, at the first camp granted to SWAPO to build a united liberation army, tensions emerged which divided inhabitants and precipitated multiple defections and imprisonments. Although these tensions at Kongwa were eventually 'resolved', similar issues have repeatedly surfaced among Namibians, sometimes with dramatic consequences. For example, in 1976, following 'the exodus' of a new generation of Namibians into Zambia, the liberation movement detained more than a thousand SWAPO guerrillas and eleven leaders who had openly criticized some of the SWAPO leadership and called for a Party Congress. During the mid- and late 1980s, members of SWAPO's security apparatus exploited conditions in Angola – including class and regional tensions and suspicions of spies within the liberation movement – to imprison and eliminate Namibians whom they mistrusted.<sup>180</sup> And in 1999, nearly a decade after Namibia's independence, a Caprivi secessionist movement, led by Mishake Muyongo, launched an attack on Katima Mulilo, resulting in the arrest of more than a hundred accused secessionists and a state treason trial which remains on-going. Across these years, the same organization and many of the same individuals who were responsible for governing Namibians at Kongwa have governed the Namibian nation, addressing and shaping conflicts among its members. And Namibian citizens have invoked 'the Kongwa Crisis', viewing it as a point of origin for later conflicts and using it to discredit or defend Namibia's liberation movement, now ruling party.

Despite the significance of histories of Kongwa for Namibia, however, Kongwa was more than a Namibian event. It was a place where Namibians were shaped by the international community which surrounded and constituted them there. To see this place primarily within a broader history of SWAPO or another national liberation movement is to lose sight of the boundaries set between nations at places like Kongwa and the stakes in how different people were able to cross them. As emphasized above, the ability of Namibians to access the recognition of international organizations, the aid of foreign donors and the attention of Tanzanian women at Kongwa were highly unequal. Through their privileged access to such resources outside the camp, the commanders and the political leaders who supported them wielded considerable power over those living inside, even as the abuse of this power generated strikes, critical memoranda and other initiatives aimed at challenging camp officials' authority. These social relations, inherent to the structure of camp life, are overlooked in the previous Namibian literature on Kongwa which focuses on

---

179 Although this riot is not mentioned in previous historiography, it is discussed at some length in my dissertation 'Exile History', 230-231, 233-234. See also Interview with Nepelilo, 4 August 2007, 25-26, 29-30.

180 I discuss these developments within SWAPO in exile and the politics of their representation in Namibia in my doctoral dissertation ('Exile History') as well as in two articles: 'Ordering the Nation: SWAPO in Zambia, 1974-1976', *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37, 4 (2011), 693-713 and "'The Spy' and the Camp: SWAPO Camps in Lubango, Angola, 1980-1989', in Wayne Dooling, Hilary Sapire and Christopher Saunders, eds., *The Struggle for Southern Africa: New Local and International Perspectives* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2012).

events like ‘the Crisis’ or a few people like Castro rather than on the social context in which an international community at Kongwa lived. And they have shaped the way in which Kongwa’s history has been told – as a story about the ‘heroes’ and ‘villains’ of a particular national struggle rather than about a community living at a camp in rural, central Tanzania during the early days of southern Africa’s guerrilla armies and at the height of the Cold War.

Camps have a unique potential to elucidate social contexts which have shaped southern Africa’s past and present. Although frequently reduced to events and people in a national narrative, camps may disrupt the circuits of national knowledge production when their study draws attention to the sites where exiles lived. To this end, scholars of southern Africa have the opportunity to draw from a growing literature on ‘the camp’, highlighting the highly unequal power relations and national subjectivities which have repeatedly formed in this kind of social space across contexts.<sup>181</sup> At the same time, southern African studies may make a significant contribution to camp literature. For the places where exiles from the region lived were not mere reproductions of ‘the camp’. They were sites shaped by particular histories, some of which are shared by southern Africa as a region and others of which are unique to the specific camps concerned. Such histories may be lost in the existing literature which tends to render ‘the camp’ an abstract, apolitical space. But they are precisely the histories to which scholars of southern Africa’s recent past should be attentive – if we look beyond the dominant representations of exile, with their uncritical acceptance of the nation as the object of history, and examine the lived spaces in which the region’s national communities formed abroad.

Kongwa is one such lived space with special significance for southern Africa and for the study of its liberation movements’ camps. As the first site granted to southern Africa’s OAU recognized liberation movements to govern their fellow nationals abroad, Kongwa is likely to have been formative not only for SWAPO and the communities it administered in exile, but also for many of the region’s movements. At the same time, Kongwa hosted an entirely unique collection of camps, shaped by contexts which differed from the far-flung sites in which exiles lived across the front-line states during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Both perspectives on Kongwa are obscured by national historiographies, and yet, as I suggest here, both are critical to examining camps and their legacies for southern Africa.

---

181 Formative and widely cited texts in this literature include: Hannah Arendt, ‘The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man’ in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1951), 267-302; Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).